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ABSTRACT

The booklet outlines characteristics and competencies needed by principals in schools serving special education students. Traits of empathy, integrity, honesty, creativity, and imagination are among those considered. Competencies (in terms of knowledge, values and attitudes, and performance) are listed for seven functions: to promote and represent the developing trends and issues which affect special education programs in schools; to foster and participate in constructive staff development; to observe, evaluate, and support the development of appropriate, instructive learning environments; to communicate about assessment programs and methods; to plan, implement, and evaluate organizational structures which permit cooperative processes and relationships with school, home, and community; to oversee architectural consideration; and to assure that issues affecting special education students are understood by political representatives and legislators. (CL)

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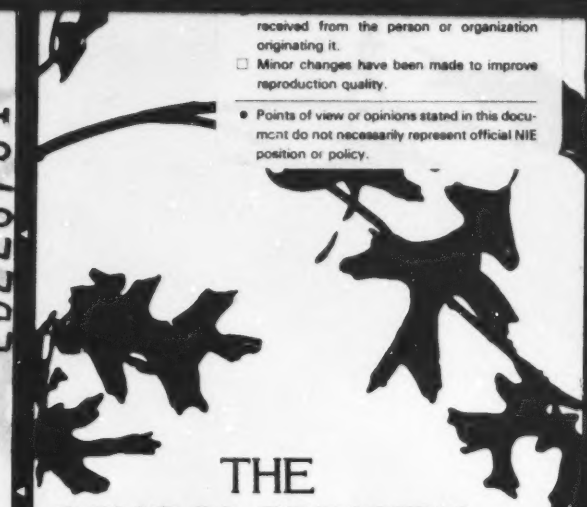
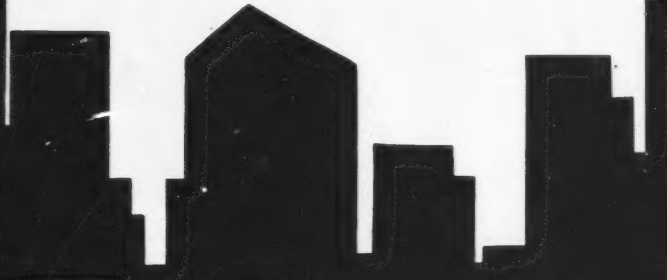


THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

BASIC FUNCTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS WHO HAVE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THEIR SCHOOLS WITH COMPETENCIES NEEDED TO PERFORM THE ROLE



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Introduction

An effective school is seen as the optimum learning environment for facilitating the cognitive, affective, social, and aesthetic development of all students. One of the chief determinants of the effectiveness of a school is the principal. There is a considerable body of research which claims it is the principal who is the single most important factor in a school.

Certainly in a school which has groups of handicapped children, the principal sets the tone for the whole staff, students, and parents, and community attitude toward these special students.

To define the role of the principal of an effective school, then, it is necessary to identify the leadership functions requisite to the creation of an optimum learning environment for children and youth. To carry out the leadership functions, the person who serves in the leadership role must have or/and acquire a set of characteristics and competencies. The characteristics and competencies presented here are not to be taken as a complete taxonomy but are those which relate to the principal's role in a school with groups of handicapped children. It is presented and considered significant, however, in determining the principal's enactment of the role which is based on knowledge, beliefs, and performance. Not all dimensions of a role lead to precise specifications, but a number of the domains are analyzed here.

Competencies are defined as specific abilities which an individual has or can develop, such as the ability to interview, consult, plan, train, or negotiate. They are not presented here in a hierarchical structure.

Characteristics are defined as distinguishing qualities, attributes, or features which an individual has or may develop, such as curiosity, vitality, patience, or charisma.

This taxonomy is in a continuous process of development. It is not seen as all inclusive. The significance of any of the characteristics or competencies relates to the multitude of variables of any school situation. Not all functions are necessary in all role situations. Therefore, the competencies a principal may need to have will vary with the settings.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRINCIPAL

While principals who lead schools that service special education populations must possess all the strengths of their contemporaries in regular educational settings, there are characteristics which are particularly vital and must be developed to a greater degree.

It is essential that principals in special education settings relate to others as equal and differentiated individuals. They are empathetic not only to the plight of handicapped vs. non-handicapped students, but to different types of handicapping conditions as well, recognizing that the manifestation of particular disabilities may run counter to the behavioral expectations normally held for students. In doing so, they separate their needs from the needs of others and demonstrate a commitment to cultural pluralism and social justice while holding high expectations for all students.

The empathy of these principals is also extended to teachers working with special needs children. They are cognizant of the physical and emotional demands which these students make upon staff and provide an environment where faculty members feel free to examine themselves and raise questions without fearing misjudgment, rejection or manipulation by the principal. The creation of such a setting requires a principal who demonstrates integrity, honesty, adaptability, creativity, imagination, openness and a sense of humor.

Principals in special education settings recognize that student and program success depends a great deal upon the personal and professional commitment of themselves and their staff. Aware that the sense of responsibility guiding the spirit of commitment may peak and ebb, these principals are able to recognize and analyze these fluctuations, and strive to enable all staff to continuously recommit themselves to their work. In doing so, they clearly see themselves as agents of change, working for self and organizational renewal.

BASIC FUNCTIONS AND COMPETENCIES FOR PRINCIPALS

FUNCTION I. To promote and represent the developing trends and issues which affect special education programs in a school, a principal:

COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Understands the societal and legal background which is the basis for P.L. 94-142;
- ☐ Knows the Federal and State requirements for evaluating and placing children with handicapping conditions;
- ☐ Understands the need to keep abreast of the financial, personnel, and educational resources which may be available to their schools;
- ☐ Understands the complexity of decision-making procedures for evaluating, placing, and developing Individualized Education Programs (I.E.P.'s) and monitoring services for children with handicapping conditions;
- ☐ Understands the need for attitudinal changes among the general education people in order to successfully develop special education programs within the school.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

- ☐ Believes in the rights of all children to maximum educational opportunity;
- ☐ Believes school personnel must endeavor with all resources available to have effective education for all children;
- ☐ Believes that effective education may result from the heterogeneous grouping of children with a range of learning needs and strengths.

PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Communicates the basic knowledge and beliefs through discussions, reports, questions, illustrations;
- ☐ Demonstrates, via reports, discussions, questions and presentations, an awareness of current legal issues in special education;
- ☐ Demonstrates an awareness of current governmental policies which may effect special education funding and programming.

FUNCTION II. To foster and participate in staff development programs which enable all staff members to work collaboratively, systematically and effectively in meeting the needs of children with handicapping conditions, a principal:

COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Understands that success in educating the special child depends largely upon each teacher's ability to develop positive attitudes and workable programs, augmented by necessary support personnel, facilities and materials;
- ☐ Understands the various needs of children with handicapping conditions in order to determine which groups of children or individual children may best learn in the available environments in the schools;
- ☐ Understands adult learning and development concepts;
- ☐ Knows the principles and processes which enable adults to learn;
- ☐ Understands the need to keep abreast of current programmatic trends in special education;
- ☐ Understands the need to create a professional environment which is supportive of the special education teacher.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

- ☐ Believes in the ability of all staff to learn to work effectively with a wide range of children in the classroom;
- ☐ Believes that the total school setting and staff can and should be geared towards meeting the needs of all children, those with and without handicapping conditions;
- ☐ Believes that positive results can occur when regular and special education teachers are given the opportunity to learn from each other in structured, directed activities.

PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Plans and executes effective individual and group processes which promote professional development;
- ☐ Fosters and becomes involved in staff development, seeks to provide resources, personnel and materials, and coordinates and clarifies the interlocking organizational components necessary to deal with the everyday educational needs of children with handicapping conditions;

- ☐ Demonstrates skill in defining, delegating and distributing functions among interested and competent staff persons;
- ☐ Plans and negotiates pupil assignment patterns with individual teachers or teams, seeking to balance out the responsibilities and duties of regular and special needs students;
- ☐ Provides teachers with access to adequate staff library;
- ☐ Provides staff with needed released time so that examples of programmatic options which exist outside of the immediate school environment may be explored;
- ☐ Seeks to provide space, time and assistance for teachers to develop special instructional materials.

FUNCTION III. To formally and informally observe, evaluate, and support the development of appropriate, instructive learning environments for children with handicapping conditions in all educational structures and/or settings, a principal:

COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Understands the key concepts of P.L. 94-142, particularly those regarding individualized educational programming;
- ☐ Understands curriculum areas as they relate to specific types of handicapping conditions. Among those areas are: skills for daily living, language and communication, social and behavioral development, regular academic subjects, psychomotor development and career education;
- ☐ Knows specific techniques and approaches for structuring classrooms where the education of special needs students will take place;
- ☐ Knows effective procedures and guidelines for maintaining records and reports:
- ☐ Knows techniques and approaches to discipline and behavior management;
- ☐ Understands the normal growth of children in the cognitive, affective and psycho-motor domains and how these areas can be effected by specific handicapping conditions;
- ☐ Knows specific instructional techniques, approaches and materials which are relevant to the education of children with handicapping conditions;

- ☐ Believes in the need for close interaction between the principal and the special education staff;
- ☐ Believes that children with handicapping conditions should be taught by methods which are geared to take maximum advantage of their learning styles;
- ☐ Believes that all special needs children have a right to an Individualized Educational Plan.

PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Observes, formally and informally, special education programs within the school on a regular basis;
- ☐ Regularly confers with special education teachers regarding their professional needs and perceptions;
- ☐ Communicates and reevaluates the current practice and programs which are provided in their school setting for special needs children;
- ☐ Demonstrates competence and interest in utilizing the services of supervisory and consultant specialists;
- ☐ Communicates program dilemmas with solid information derived from classroom observations, discussions, and readings;
- ☐ Identifies entry points and approaches to alter and improve the opportunities for special needs children.

FUNCTION IV. To effectively and accurately communicate the nature and purpose of assessment programs and methods, a principal:

COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Understands both formal and informal evaluative instruments and techniques including: direct observation, interviews, questionnaires, paper and pencil academic tasks, manipulative devices, work samples and criterion reference tests;
- ☐ Knows the issues and arguments related to non-discriminatory assessment;
- ☐ Understands the ways in which cultural attitudes and experiences effect the results and validity of assessment instruments;
- ☐ Understands how test structure, content and administration can effect the exclusionary and academic predictive uses of psychometric devices.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

- ☐ Believes that assessment is an on-going process, important to daily planning procedures as well as long range planning;
- ☐ Believes that differences are natural to the human condition;
- ☐ Believes in and affirms the notion that human similarities as well as human differences can be potential sources for creating an interesting and rich school environment;
- ☐ Believes that evaluation instruments and procedures should validly reflect the language and cultural norms of the child's primary social milieu. Personnel administering tests should be keenly aware of the effects of language and cultural attitudes on intellectual behavior;
- ☐ Believes that tests and other evaluation devices should provide information on the educational needs of children for improved instruction.

PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Demonstrates via various modes of communication reports and illustrations, knowledge on current evaluative placement procedures;
- ☐ Encourages the development and use of evaluation instruments which most accurately measure the learning behavior of their particular school population.

FUNCTION V: To plan, implement and evaluate organizational structures which permit cooperative processes and relationships between the school, home, and community and the Board of Education, Departments for Special Education, a principal:

COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Understands the key concepts of P.L. 94-142 regarding "Procedural Safeguards," interdisciplinary team approach to evaluation, placement and annual review;
- ☐ Understands the need for open communication between the school, home, community and the Board of Education, Departments for Special Education;
- ☐ Knows the variety of relevant related services and program options available to special education students.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

- ☐ Believes that growth and development are determined by a dynamic interaction of many variables within many environments;
- ☐ Believes in a holistic approach to program and service development;
- ☐ Believes that the home, school and community are active participators in defining and supporting program and service development.

PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Plans, recommends and elicits from concerned parties, organizational structures which facilitate communication and participation by and among the appropriate persons, teachers, parents, specialists and children;
- ☐ Communicates to home, school and community the school policies and practices related to all children and their right to an appropriate education;
- ☐ Utilizes the prevailing community attitudes toward special needs children;
- ☐ Utilizes all resources available to aid in the education of children with special needs;
- ☐ Recommends, selects and supports the development of appropriate related services for children with handicapping conditions.

FUNCTION VI. To manage, utilize, and communicate the architectural advantages of a school plant and facilities so as to appropriately provide for special needs children, a principal:

COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Understands the implications of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, related to building access requirements for physically handicapped individuals;
- ☐ Understands the importance that time and space variables can play in the formulation of effective educational programs for the handicapped.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

- ☐ Believes the physical space of the school should accommodate and facilitate the physical mobility needs of the student and adult population using the school;
- ☐ Believes the space of the school should build the sense of safeness for special education students and allow them to develop confidence and competence in moving about the school building.

PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Monitors the transportation services of children with handicapping conditions;
- ☐ Communicates the architectural and safety features of the building with all appropriate personnel;
- ☐ Acts to make school safe and architecturally appropriate for children with handicapping conditions.

FUNCTION VII: To assure that issues affecting special education students within a school are adequately understood and addressed by political representatives, local, state, and federal legislators, a principal:

COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE

- ☐ Understands the process involved in the formulation of local, state, and federal laws;
- ☐ Knows which individuals are able to influence policy makers involved with issues affecting schools;
- ☐ Understands the history of political structures within the local and state communities;
- ☐ Knows the issues which are of concern to special interest groups within the local and state communities;
- ☐ Understands the degree of influence wielded by special interest groups in the local and state communities;
- ☐ Knows how to bring the concern of his/her school to the attention of local, state, and federal legislators.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

- ☐ Believes that the principal has a responsibility for generating political action on issues which affect special education;
- ☐ Believes that the issues or concerns of special education are significant and are to be brought to the attention of local, state, and federal legislators.

PERFORMANCE

- ☐ Reads the publications on special interest groups who exert substantial political influence on educational institutions;
- ☐ Attends meetings of local relevant community groups;
- ☐ Directly communicates to local, state, and federal legislators, the issues affecting special education programs within their school.

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